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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to discuss possible connections between philosophy of education and educational policy. Philosophy of education relates integrally to individual, institutional, and social contexts. Educational policy shares a similar, even more varied, context which often complicates the mixed questions asked by educational philosophers. The meaning one attaches to educational policy is in some way linked to those social perceptions and expectations which he/she brings to his/her policy considerations. Policy may mean different things to different people, partly depending on one's purpose and the social context which circumscribes that purpose. Through critical analysis of social and normative, as well as descriptive, issues, philosophy of education could perform a catalytic function for educational policy. Ultimately, preservation of philosophical perspective must be an implicit boundary condition for those educational philosophers deciding to enter the policy arena. While attempting to create ideological constructions at the behest of those who hold power, these philosophers may come perilously close to shattering that delicate intellectual barrier which separates their calling from that of political ideology. (RC)

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EDUCATIONAL POLICY STUDIES: QUEST FOR CONSENSUS?

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At the Philosophy of Education Society's 29th Annual Meeting in 1973, John Martin Rich discussed possible connections between philosophy of education and educational policy. His rationale for doing so was to "determine more clearly the possible role(s) for philosophy of education in educational policy studies."¹ In view of the burgeoning interest in this role, Professor Rich's presentation was timely and, hopefully, a harbinger of further discussion on the theoretical and practical implications of such connections. The purpose of my paper is to continue this dialogue by primarily offering some additional routes for future discourse. Unfortunately, I may muddy the clarity of Professor Rich's path, but these are virgin surfaces whose groundwork has not been thoroughly laid out.

Rich begins his analysis by isolating what he considers to be currently established interpretations of philosophy of education. These he treats "more or less descriptively in terms of the types of inquiries which have been conducted within the field by recognized persons."² He then demarcates those modes of inquiry into speculative, metatheoretical, analytical, and normative dimensions, as well as including studies of the nature of disciplines. Though this may be a neat classification, it excludes some potentially significant perspectives for educational philosophy and policy. Prima facie, philosophy of education relates integrally to individual, institutional, and social contexts. Educational policy shares a similar, even more variegated, context

which often complicates the mixed questions asked by educational philosophers.³ In any joint enterprise of educational philosophy and policy, it might therefore prove fruitful (1) to enlist the broad resources of the social sciences, especially the sociology of knowledge; (2) to account for the human insights posed by those "unrecognized persons" who would likely be affected by the policy we presume to generate; and (3) to begin asking some tough moral questions about that policy. (These recommendations provide the background for my subsequent discussion.) As educational philosophers, we might also perform one crucial service which Rich overlooks: to be critics of that wider social context which cushions both educational philosophy and policy.

I. Is Consensus the Only Answer?

After disposing of various interpretations of "policy" as too normative, Rich propounds his own use of that term:

Policy . . . functions differently than purposes and goals.

Policy serves several functions. It serves to regulate institutions and organizations; it provides orderly guidelines for day-to-day operations and thereby affords a sense of continuity.⁴

In his definition, Rich appears to adopt a classical functional argument; in so doing, he fails to notice the normative thrust of his own concept.

Functional systems have provided the foundation for innumerable modern social theories from Durkheim to Talcott Parsons. Order, equilibrium, and evolutionary change compose the descriptive matrix and the prescriptive exigency of such systems:

The most general and fundamental property of a system is the interdependence of parts or variables . . . which is order in the relationships among the components which enter into a system. This order must have a tendency to self-maintenance.⁵

The significance of the concept of function implies the conception of the empirical system as a "going concern." Its structure is that system of determinate patterns which empirical observation shows, within certain limits, "tend to be maintained" or . . . "tend to develop" according to an empirically constant pattern. Functional significance in this context is inherently teleological.⁶

Now Rich also points out that "some concepts--permanence, change, continuity, order, etc.--have metaphysical overtones; however, policy is not principally a speculative or metaphysical study."⁷ However, he acknowledges no implicit limitations in his own statements because he does not recognize their normative and speculative underpinning. That is, a policy derived from functionalism has itself been conceived out of a rather fixed system of perception and belief. Parsons, for example, does admit to an ultimately teleological reference; he is less willing to concede that such an assumed set of goals actually delimits the dynamics of his system. In effect, his perceptual scheme acts as a selective filter, one which allows his theoretical structure to "hang together" by mitigating against those "exceptional circumstances" which threaten his conception of the "natural order of things."⁸ Furthermore, Parsons presumes

a substantial agreement on the values and norms, both individual and social, which he undertakes to study. Even if this were sociologically accurate (which surely remains to be seen), the philosophical question remains open. To accept functional analysis blindly would be tantamount to abandoning the cautions and prerogatives of philosophical analysis. In this respect, we would be untrue to our role as educational philosophers and uncritical as contributors to educational policy.

In broad outline, Rich's functionalist premises rest upon an assumed "consensus" of shared beliefs and expectations about human behavior. The assignment of specific tasks, rules, and roles serves to stabilize a given consensual construction of social reality. Moreover, if that system is to maintain itself as a "going concern," it must be protected from external criticism and upheaval: subprocesses may be changed, but not the structure itself. Thus, if any innovation does arise, it must come from within the organizational system itself.⁹

The deviant cannot be tolerated, for the exception can only upset the smooth functioning of the system. Once unmasked, the functional argument for consensus shows itself as an essentially conservative defense: it effectively eliminates any rival thesis which might menace its own existence.¹⁰

II. Are There Options?

This excursion into the sociology of knowledge has attempted to show that the meaning one attaches to "educational policy" is in some

way linked to those social perceptions and expectations which he brings to his policy considerations. It becomes especially difficult to separate description and prescription in policymaking when the policymaker (e.g., Rich) is apparently unaware of his tacit acceptance of any such perspective. Social scientists face this fundamental predicament whenever they accept a certain paradigm by which to conceptualize and structure knowledge. According to Thomas S. Kuhn, "[A paradigm] restricts the phenomenological field accessible for scientific investigation at any time."¹¹ That condition would appear to be doubly restrictive for the more practical orientation of the educational policymaker. Less concerned with issues of "objectivity," he is at least partly accountable to some particular group, organizational, or institutional interest. Wittingly or not, Rich and Parsons have tended to serve dominant and established interests in their rush toward consensus. They have restricted themselves to a given range of allowable questions with an intra-organizational solution.

"Policy" may thus mean different things to different people, partly depending upon one's purpose and the social context which circumscribes that purpose. For example, would Jonathan Kozol work within Rich's policy model in his effort to establish alternative free schools?¹² More likely, he would eventually seem to be working against it. Yet Kozol did begin his educational decision-making by first accepting the criteria of consensus (i.e., his tour of duty as a teacher in the Boston public schools). He came to reject those standards when he concluded that his moral and social concern demanded some radical antithesis to

existing organizational and institutional structures. Just as significantly, he decided to become an advocate of other group interests—in this case, of course, he chose in behalf of the Boston poor instead of the central school bureaucracy. James McClellan offers an apt description of this typical transformation from consensus to other alternatives:

. . . it is obviously relevant to ask what effect, in fact, the proposed policy will have on the pattern of institutions which now makes social life possible [i.e., one necessarily begins with the functional argument for consensus]. Even those who claim to find no value in the existing society should recognize an obligation to pursue the question of fact until a rough outline begins to emerge. . . .

Questions of value, however, cannot be answered by a functional argument. . . . To deal seriously with . . . ethical questions requires that all participants in the debate be willing to transcend the functional argument form when its limitations have been reached.¹³

Consequently, we seem to have come full circle: from the feckless functionalist denial of normative intent to ^{other} options, e.g., weighing open moral questions within a changing social context. The functional argument might afford us more security, but would it be a false security? The alternative option might vitiate any quest for consensus, but could it also portend more earnest dialogue? Through critical analysis of social and

normative, as well as descriptive, issues, philosophy of education could perform a catalytic function for educational policy. It might compel policymakers to search their souls, to see whose interest they are reflecting--and why. To answer such questions, we must investigate the social context which is their ground. First, however, educational philosophers would do well to become self-conscious about their own social and moral response as they attempt to guide policy.

III. Why the Interest in Educational Policy Studies?

Since philosophers of education are speculating seriously about their role in educational policy studies, now may be the time to ask why they have become so interested in the first place. What might one find by applying a sociology of knowledge to an inquiry into the connection between educational philosophy and educational policy? Is there an underlying anxiety in the social situation surrounding the relationship?¹⁴

In an intriguing essay in social theory, S. N. Eisenstadt claims that intellectuals are both "creators" and "carriers" of tradition who perform their function as the "conscience of society within the framework of existing traditions."¹⁵ Out of such a consensual system, intellectuals form a peculiar relationship with policymakers:

The greater the degree of structural economic and technological development of a society, the greater the degree to which the political elites become dependent on the technical resources, knowledge, and skills of various specialist [intellectual] groups. . . . Such conditions also tend to increase the intellectuals' ambivalence toward authority and to increase the possibility of their total submission to authority and renunciation of their own autonomous identity.¹⁶

This curious interplay between intellectuals and policymakers derives from mutual, if unequal, interests in recognition and security. While policymakers use intellectuals to legitimize certain consensual traditions, the latter rely on the former for their very protection and existence. The quest for power, influence, and survival thus seems to be at the heart of such a relationship. In the process, intellectuals are normally left in the unenviable position of having to react out of a primal need for self-preservation. For the majority, adjustment to established and dominant policy becomes a necessity; criticism and change is relegated to the deviant few who learn to enjoy anomie and alienation.

Accordingly, one wonders about the motives of those academic departments of philosophy of education which have made the sudden shift to the new rubric "educational policy studies." It appears that a similar phenomenon, variously termed "CBTE" or "PBTE," has overtaken departments of teacher education. Both competency-based instruction and educational policy studies seem to have emerged out of political, and not strictly intellectual, concerns. Accrediting agencies, public officials, state departments of education, and deans have all made certain of that concern. If one adopts its criteria, CBTE assures the public of a substantial measure of success in its school products. Analogously, interest in educational policy (e.g., service as consultants to state legislators) gives educational philosophers a measure of public accountability and respectability. But why has philosophy of education been anxiously reticent about CBTE and eagerly infatuated with policy studies? Might this ambivalence

be due to a singularly consensual reaction?

Ultimately, preservation of philosophical perspective must be an implicit boundary condition for those educational philosophers deciding to enter the policy arena. While attempting to create ideational constructions at the behest of those who hold power, these philosophers may come perilously close to shattering that delicate intellectual barrier which separates their calling from that of political ideology.¹⁷ Flirtation with action can put imperceptible, but profound, checks on critical avenues of thought and awareness. Ironically, educational philosophers widely recognized such a threat to intellectual freedom and transcendence when it came time to analyze the "competency movement." They were not content to be "carriers" of tradition in that instance. But, relentlessly, external administrative wheels churn on; another opportunity to participate in the actual creation of policy stares them in the face. This is heady business, especially for that great majority of educational philosophers who have never scented the pungent aroma of power. Let us hope that they have a nose for where their real interest lies. If not, only the deviant among us may escape the servitude of power and consensus.¹⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. John Martin Rich, "The Role of Philosophy of Education in Educational Policy Studies," in Philosophy of Education 1973: Proceedings of the Twenty-Ninth Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, ed. Brian Crittenden (Edwardsville, Ill.: Studies in Philosophy and Education, 1973), p. 146.
2. Loc. cit.
3. Here I do not mean to quibble with Professor Rich's distinction between "description" and "prescription." This is, of course, an obvious and traditional aide to conceptual analysis. However, I will argue that his discussion is rather uncritical of the "descriptive" premises he adopts. Rich seems to be unaware of the exceptive implications which they entail.
4. Rich, "The Role of Philosophy of Education," p. 147.
5. Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils, Toward a General Theory of Action (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 107.
6. Parsons, Essays in Sociological Theory, rev. ed. (New York: Free Press, 1954), p. 217.
7. Rich, "The Role of Philosophy of Education," p. 154.
8. Fundamental to the sociology of knowledge is the theoretical condi-

tion that any "social or cultural construction of reality usually emphasizes some dimensions of human existence . . . as setting up the limits of the permissible and meaningful parameters of experience. In the process, it may suppress other dimensions or relegate them to secondary or subterranean levels." S. N. Eisenstadt, "Intellectuals and Tradition," Daedalus 101, no. 2 (Spring 1972): 5.

9. Rich, "The Role of Philosophy of Education," p. 147. Cf. Parsons, The Social System (New York: Free Press, 1951), p. 486.
10. For a cogent critique of the "conservative" bond between functionalism and educational policy, see James E. McClellan, "Policy, Educational," in The Encyclopedia of Education, vol. 7 (New York: Macmillan Co. and Free Press, 1971), pp. 168-181, especially p. 179.
11. Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), pp. 60-61. Cf. Stephen Toulmin, Foresight and Understanding (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 57: "We see the world through [given concepts] to such an extent that we forget what it would be like without them: our very commitment to them tends to blind us to other possibilities."
12. See Jonathan Kozol, Free Schools (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1972) and Death at an Early Age (Boston: (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967).
13. McClellan, "Policy, Educational," p. 180.
14. John Wilson, Thinking with Concepts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 33-34.

15. Eisenstadt, "Intellectuals and Tradition," p. 1. (My italics.)
16. Ibid., p. 13
17. For some classic distinctions on this theme, see Karl Mannheim, Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge. trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936).
18. Historical examples of educators' adoption of business models and social scientists' contributions to corporate interests may be found in Raymond E. Callahan, Education and the Cult of Efficiency (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) and Loren Baritz, The Servants of Power (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1965).